

L A D Y L U C K

"Mil contos -- Grand prize!"

There is nothing more ubiquitous, more persistent, or more characteristic of Brazilian cities than the lottery vendor. He buttonholes his prospective customer, assuring him he has the lucky number, which is sure to win the grand prize of a thousand contos (a conto is one thousand cruzeiros, or mil réis, as they were called up to 1943, and is worth about forty dollars). Newcomers to Brazil find the lottery vendors particularly trying. One should never make the mistake of trying to argue with them, or offer any reason for not buying. That gives the impression that they prospective buyer is hesitating, and they redouble their efforts. A simple refusal, repeated often enough, is generally effective; but many people, having more regard perhaps for expediency than for strict truth, dispel the vendor with the words: "Já comprei" (I've already bought mine.)

The national lottery, operated by the federal government, has been in existence for many years, and is reputedly honest in its administration. It would be difficult to estimate the effect that the lottery has had on the psychology of the Brazilian people. Many a man neglects his work, or allows himself to get hopelessly into debt, thinking that some day his luck will be in, and that everything can be put right. Many a person deprives himself of the necessities of life to buy lottery tickets, and thus keep alive the dream of suddenly finding all his financial problems solved at a stroke.

This has a tendency to make a man confide in his luck, rather than in painstaking effort, for success. There is a streak of sadness in Brazilians, which appears in many of their songs, which speak of man as helpless in the hands of a relentless fate, subject to being broken at any moment on the wheel of destiny. But in general they are very happy, for after all the luck may turn. And who knows? Perhaps we will win the grand prize next week, and all our troubles be over.

The lottery idea carries over into many other fields. Many investment companies issue a sort of savings bond, or policy, on which the holder pays so much a month for so many years, so that on the specified date it comes to be redeemable at its full face value. But there is always a lottery connected with these, so that at specified times a number is drawn, and the policy corresponding to that number is redeemable immediately at full face value. The element of chance involved is one of the strongest arguments used in selling these policies; and doubtless many people are led to embark on savings programs who would never do so, but for the chance of the policy being premiado, by the drawing of the lucky number.

Even school examinations are influenced. The Brazilian educational law requires each teacher in a government accredited school to organize the subject matter taught into a series of "points" for the examination, -- ten for the mid-term, and twenty for the final examination -- each "point" to consist of three subdivisions, called quesitos. On the occasion of the examination, little discs or balls bearing numbers from one to ten, or twenty, as the case may be, are placed in a bag, and in the presence of the government inspector some pupil is asked to reach his hand into the bag, and draw out a number -- and the examination is given solely on the subject matter included in the "point" on the list corresponding to that number. Naturally, some of the subject matter is much more familiar to the pupils than other; and thus the element of chance looms large. Many a lazy pupil fritters away his time when he should be studying, consoling himself with the thought that perhaps an easy "point" may be drawn, enabling him to get by. And since the pupils are as superstitious as their elders, they often come to think of certain numbers as being lucky, or unlucky; and certain pupils are considered to have a não boa (good hand) for drawing lucky numbers.

All over the world there is a great deal of superstition associated with the idea of luck, but I doubt if any country exceeds Brazil in this respect. When a person has any number brought forcibly to his attention, as, for example, the number of a house in front of which one slips and falls, or the number of a car by which one is almost run down in the street, he concludes that that number must have some

significance for him; and he will either seek to buy a lottery ticket with that number, or some combination of it, or else will studiously avoid it in all its combinations, if he deems it unlucky. Dreams are considered to be particularly significant, and if one should dream of a number he would believe that that number must infallibly be a winner.

Each lottery ticket, in addition to its number, bears the picture of some animal; and thus there has grown up a sort of secondary lottery, in which the play is on the animal, instead of the number. This is known as the jogo de bicho, the last word being a very general word for any sort of animal. Since the number of animals represented is very small in comparison with the range of the numbers, the chances of winning are greatly increased, and the odds correspondingly lowered. The jogo de bicho is especially favored by the poor, as very small bets are accepted; and even the desperately poor place their insignificant bets, and keep up their hope that sooner or later their luck will save them. The government has frequently outlawed the jogo de bicho, and it disappears for a time, but always comes back, legally or illegally, and goes on openly, as before.

In the jogo de bicho superstition has free rein; for while one seldom dreams of a number, one may easily dream of an animal, or encounter an animal under unusual circumstances. One of my servants told me that she had dreamed of a rabbit, and had straightway bet on the rabbit, and won. She bet twenty centavos, or about one cent, and the payoff was at ten to one. On one occasion I was traveling by bus from Garanhuns to Recife, when the bus ran over a large rattlesnake in the road. The snake, badly wounded, got into the brush, and nobody showed any desire to pursue it, to find out whether the wound was mortal. About two weeks later I made the trip again, and had the same driver. When we came to the place, he asked if I remembered the snake, and when I replied affirmatively he said, "That snake cost me fourteen cruzeiros" (about seventy cents). It seemed that he had planned to bet on a certain animal, but after running over the snake he had felt sure the snake would be the winner, and bet on it, only to have his former choice prove the winner.

A story that went the rounds in Brazil a few years ago was that on the occasion of a big religious procession in Rio de Janeiro a woman among the onlookers saw in the procession a friend of hers who, she believed, would have the desired information, and called to her, asking what had been the winning bicho in that day's drawing. The people in the procession were chanting:

Ave, ave, ave Maria,
Ave, ave, ave Maria.

And the woman, willing to accommodate her friend, replied, almost without breaking the chant, "Ave, ave, avestruz" (ostrich).

Sometimes one may dream about some animal not included in the list, or of some other object. Then the problem is to interpret the dream, so as to know how to play. One of my teachers told me an amusing anecdote that illustrates the far fetched conclusions that are sometimes reached.

One woman told her neighbor that she had dreamed of a coqueiro (coconut palm), and asked her advice as to the interpretation that should be placed on it for the jogo. The neighbor scratched her head and thought aloud: "coqueiro, coqueiro, côco, côco, quenga, (a quenga is a dipper made from a coconut shell, but in popular language the word means prostitute as well) quenga, mulher de soldado (soldier's wife) (and, since such a woman is often called a "hen") galinha, .. joga em galo" (bet on the rooster).